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Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in accordance with a request of the Commission at its thirty-sixth session.[a] It summarizes the main conclusions of the two 2005 meetings of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 28 February 2005 and in Rome, from 12 to 14 September 2005, respectively. The present report is presented for information. The Commission may wish to take the views expressed by the Committee into account in its discussions of relevant agenda items.

[a] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 4* (E/2005/24), chap. I.B.

* E/CN.3/2006/1

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities, chaired by the International Labour Organization (ILO), held its fifth and sixth meetings in New York on 28 February 2005 and in Rome, from 12 to 14 September 2005, respectively.

2. The main objective of the Committee is to promote coordination, integration and complementarity among the statistical programmes of international organizations, to prevent programme duplication and to reduce reporting burdens on Member States, and to promote coordination and consistency in statistical practices and development. At its fifth and sixth meetings, the Committee shared information, discussed coordination of activities and agreed on subsequent steps to be undertaken in a number of common areas of work. Forty-three people representing 30 international agencies and organizations attended the fifth meeting in New York, and 26 people, representing 21 international agencies and organizations attended the sixth meeting in Rome. A complete list of participating agencies is given in the annex.

II. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Principles for statistical activities in international organizations

3. At its fifth meeting, the Committee took note of the draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division (for details of work on the declaration of principles, see E/CN.3/2006/13). It agreed that the text should be redrafted without legally binding wording and with a focus on practices. At the sixth meeting, the revised draft, entitled "Principles and practices for International Statistics" was presented, reviewed and endorsed by the Committee. The Committee decided that agencies should review their current practices in relation to the principles and disseminate the results of the review. It was decided that the principles and practices would be posted on the Statistics Division website dedicated to good statistical practices, with related information on their use by Committee members based on extracts from other agencies' websites. The Committee also agreed that the principles and practices could be used in different ways by agencies, individually or collectively with others, depending on their specific needs and circumstances. It took note of the fact that the mandate and governance of individual international organizations could be such that not all principles and practices were applicable under current circumstances, even though they could be used for future improvements.

B. Issues relating to the implementation of good statistical practices in international organizations

4. At its fifth meeting, the Committee took note of a set of proposals to promote the implementation of principles for international statistics, prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (see

E/CN.3/2006/22), and of the oral presentation by the representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Committee discussed the development of new technical standards under the auspices of the Standards for Data and Metadata Exchange initiative; the development of a quality-assurance framework; and the idea of assessing the needs and reviewing existing initiatives on the training of statisticians within international organizations. The Committee agreed to form teams to prepare papers on the three above-mentioned initiatives: OECD would lead the preparation of a paper on the Metadata Exchange initiative; the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) would coordinate the preparation of a paper on quality assurance; and IMF would prepare a report on training programmes for statisticians in international organizations.

5. At its sixth meeting, the Committee took note of the reports of the three teams. On the first report, the Committee agreed that the development of new technical standards under the auspices of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange initiative was an important step towards an agreed set of rules for data collection, with the potential of making data and metadata exchange more efficient. It also agreed that a decision on the adoption by the Committee of the initiative would be made at the next session in March 2006.

6. Eurostat presented the report on the development of a quality-assurance framework for international and supranational organizations. The Committee agreed that the project was very useful and should continue. Eurostat was mandated to continue the process on the basis of the report presented at the meeting. The following groups were formed to continue the work on key areas:

(a) Quality frameworks: Eurostat, IMF, European Central Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

(b) Systems for reviews: Eurostat, OECD, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE);

(c) Quality reporting: Eurostat, FAO;

(d) Labelling statistical information: Eurostat, European Central Bank;

(e) European Conference on Quality in Survey Statistics: Eurostat, United Nations Statistics Division;

(f) Implementation: Eurostat, ILO.

7. The Committee took note of the report submitted by IMF to assess existing staff training initiatives in international organizations. The Committee welcomed the initiative and agreed to establish a network of representatives from all agencies to exchange information and training materials and explore possible new activities. It was decided that IMF would continue to be the lead agency for this work.

C. Tourism statistics

8. At its fifth meeting, the Committee welcomed the advances made by the inter-secretariat working group on tourism statistics, encouraged it to continue its work as outlined in the report prepared by the World Tourism Organization and decided that no further action by the Committee was required.

D. Statistics software

9. At its fifth meeting, the Committee welcomed the inventory of statistics software prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division and asked that it be extended to include information on licensing and cost of transfer, and be posted on the Committee's website. It also noted that the sharing of information on software could be extended to include countries. The issue was not discussed at the sixth meeting.

E. Coordination of technical cooperation activities

10. At its fifth meeting, the Committee welcomed the offer by the Statistics Division to take the lead in the preparation of a paper on how the Committee could most effectively coordinate technical cooperation. The paper was prepared in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, IMF, OECD and the World Tourism Organization, and presented at the sixth meeting.

11. At its sixth meeting, the Committee reviewed ways of improving coordination among its members and possibly other multilateral and bilateral donors, in developing and implementing statistical capacity-building programmes in countries. It was decided that the Committee would propose activities and establish efficient coordination mechanisms, the Statistics Division would prepare a paper to outline proposals in the area, and that a half-day special session would be devoted to discussions of coordination and approaches to strategic planning for capacity-building activities and define the scope of such work at the eighth meeting in September 2006. The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century would provide substantial input to this work, based on information collected for the Forum for African Statistical Development.

F. International Household Survey Network

12. At its sixth meeting, the Committee took note of a report prepared by the World Bank in conjunction with members of the International Household Survey Network management group, outlining progress achieved since the launch of the network in 2004 and highlighting areas and issues for future work. The Committee agreed that the Network was an important initiative and represented a useful step towards better coordination of international efforts for household surveys in developing countries. The Committee also agreed that successful implementation depended on addressing key issues — such as microdata confidentiality — and would require full involvement of members of the management group and their review of the upcoming work programme. The Committee also recognized that the involvement of national statistical offices at a later stage would be crucial.

G. Classification of statistical activities

13. At the sixth Committee meeting, ECE presented the process undertaken to revise its classification of statistical activities. The Committee agreed that it would await the completion of the process and the adoption by the Conference of European

Statisticians of the classification before exploring the possibility of adapting the ECE classification to the needs of other international agencies.

H. Inter-secretariat working group on services statistics

14. At its sixth meeting, the Committee took note of the oral presentation by OECD on the formation of the inter-secretariat working group on services statistics and the preliminary work done. It was agreed that the report of the Group to the Statistical Commission would highlight priorities and possible areas of interest, including links with work previously done in the area.

I. Other issues discussed at the sixth meeting

15. The Committee was informed of the assessment by the Statistics Division of the capacity of countries to produce Millennium Development Goals indicators, under the guidance of the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goals indicators. The representative of the Statistics Division explained that the assessment was being made on the basis of the data currently available in the indicators database maintained by the Division.

16. The Committee took note of a proposal to establish a professional association of international statisticians, based on individual membership. It welcomed the initiative and offered its support to the process of creating the association.

17. The Committee welcomed the trend of an increasing number of agencies expressing interest in joining it. It welcomed the European Central Bank as a new member. The secretariat was asked to approach agencies that were not currently members to inform them of the Committee and its activities.

Annex

Participating agencies and offices

Fifth meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 28 February 2005)

United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat

- United Nations Statistics Division
- United Nations Population Division

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Population Fund

United Nations Children's Fund

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Health Organization

Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization

International Telecommunication Union

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Statistical Office of the European Communities

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Bank for International Settlements

African Development Bank

Asian Development Bank

Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics

Caribbean Community Secretariat

Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century

Sixth meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (Rome, 12-14 September 2005)

United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat

United Nations Statistics Division

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization

International Telecommunication Union

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Statistical Office of the European Communities

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Bank for International Settlements

African Development Bank

European Central Bank

Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century